Joel Avery

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There is a lot at stake this year with the presidential election – and with good reason. Everything from police brutality to gay/trans rights to the war in the Middle East, citizens are standing up and voicing their opinion. But there is one topic in particular that is finally starting to be uncovered after years of repression. Yup, you guessed it – marijuana. It seems like more and more people are starting to talk about marijuana and whether it should remain among the governments list of controlled substances. It continues to stir the pot especially in the presidential race where it seems like the country has been split into two opposing sides. In order to figure out why marijuana prohibition has risen to the top of both social and political discussion, we must find out how it was outlawed in the first place.

Let’s rewind a few hundred years to the 1600-1800’s. Hemp from cannabis plants was used universally and could make many things including rope, paper, clothing, and various medicines. (“Benson”) The economy was booming and the American citizens were happy. In the early 1900’s, the United States experienced a large increase in Mexican immigrants due to the resolution of the Mexican Revolution. As a result, false accusations were made against the immigrants saying they would kill people after ingesting marijuana. These accusations were not only racist, but hurt many Mexican families who fled to the United States – even those who had never used marijuana in their life. According to an article from Stanford University, “The Harrison Narcotics Act, passed in 1914, was the United States’ first federal drug policy.  The act restricted the manufacture and sale of marijuana, cocaine, heroin, and morphine.  The act was aggressively enforced.” (“The United”) This act incarcerated thousands of people after being legally treated by doctors using these drugs. Of course, we all know now illicit drugs such as cocaine or heroin served no real medical purpose and have been scientifically proven to do much more damage to the body than good, but nevertheless they did not know any better and were jailed anyway. Not only were the patients jailed, but the doctors as well. Thousands and thousands of lives ruined merely from the racism and stereotypes made to the Mexican immigrants. There were never any murders or crimes committed that have directly correlated to marijuana itself.

Have you ever heard of the term “Reefer Madness”? You probably have, right? Its origin started in the year 1936 after an American propaganda film came out to promote awareness of this fictional illness. It was broadcasted across the country and convinced many Americans that marijuana turned people insane. As Thor Benson states [referring to Reefer Madness] in his article on attn.com:

“*That same year, the* [*Marijuana Tax Act*](http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/hemp/taxact/mjtaxact.htm) *was passed, which made it so* [*it was illegal*](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/dope/etc/cron.html) *to have marijuana unless it was for specific medical or industrial reasons. That law was eventually ruled to be unconstitutional, but it would be replaced later on. Fast forward to the* [*Boggs Act of 1952*](http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer/library/studies/nc/nc2_7.htm) *and the* [*Narcotics Control Act of 1956*](https://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/data-and-analysis/bulletin/bulletin_1956-01-01_3_page005.html)*, which was the when the federal government started requiring minimum prison sentences for drug crimes, such as possessing marijuana. In the 1970s, President Nixon declared his war on drugs.”* (“Benson”)

By now, recreation drugs – including marijuana – were outlawed entirely which brings us back to the question: Why is marijuana coming back as a hot topic of both social and political discussion?

In order to start my investigation of the matter, I conducted a survey consisting of 12 questions regarding personal opinions on marijuana and political views. The following is what I found among a small group of 30 students around the campus of Central Michigan University.

I found that out of the 30 students that were part of this survey, 13 of them considered themselves more Republican while 17 of them considered themselves more Democratic. Although there is not much of a gap between the amount of Republicans and Democrats – only a 4-person difference – there is a noticeable gap between percentage of Republicans who support legalization and the percentage of Democrats who support the legalization. Roughly 61% of the Republicans who participated are in favor of legalization while an overwhelming 94% of Democrats support it. Granted this survey was only a small, small chunk of the data required to correctly investigate the subject, I do believe it does show some correlation. According to some demographics from Pew Research Center, they have found a similar pattern where 39% of Republicans support legalization where 63% of Democrats support it. Independent voters were also taken into consideration on this particular bit of information where a staggering 58% support while only 38% don’t. (“Section”)

Although Republicans in general are more against legalization that for it, I found that a lot of them do not think of marijuana users as “bad”, but instead they think their choices do not have any positive influence to them or the general public. One of the questions I asked was “Do you think marijuana use can hurt one’s ability to be successful? Why or why not?”. While the responses varied from person to person, a large portion of Republicans said something along the lines of “Yes, it impairs the person’s ability to think straight” and a few even said damage from marijuana is the whole reason people think it’s okay at all. On the other hand, many Democrats stated marijuana use is okay if used in moderation, and if the user has a good enough mindset to not let it become a problem. Another portion of my survey included a few questions regarding marijuana and whether or not the individual believes marijuana contains medical properties and this is what I found:

The Democratic numbers match up exactly to the previous chart: 16 (94%) believe marijuana has medical properties while only 47% of Republicans did. Perhaps this is a big indicator on why the parties have essentially split the country in regards to different ideologies.

**Benson, Thor. "The Real Reason Why Marijuana Is Illegal in the U.S." The Real Reason Why Marijuana Is Illegal in the U.S. ATTN, 8 June 2015. Web. 03 Apr. 2016.**

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